

PARSHA

VAYIKRA

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SPIRITUAL GARMENTS ARE ACQUIRED BY HUMILITY

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

It is written, "Moshe brought Aaron and his sons forward, and he immersed them in water. He placed the tunic upon him and girded him with the sash, clothed him with the robe..." (Vayikra 8:6-7).

Whoever looks more closely at this passage will notice that G-d commands Moshe to gather the entire assembly of the Children of Israel at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting so they could be present when he immersed the kohanim and clothed them with the priestly garments. Rashi explains that this gathering of the Jewish people was one of the places where a large number of people occupied a very small place. This teaches us just how important and auspicious that occasion was.

It is nevertheless difficult to understand why Moshe was given the responsibility of immersing and clothing them. Were Aaron and his sons incapable of doing it themselves? This is even more surprising given that everything was witnessed by the entire people!

In reality, it is from here that we draw lessons on the importance which the Torah places on garments. In fact a person's outer garments reveal his inner "garments." This verse teaches us that just as we must clothe our bodies, we must also clothe our souls. Furthermore, just as the value of a garment is related to its beauty, likewise the value of a spiritual garment depends on the beauty and perfection of our mitzvot and good deeds.

Our Sages have taught that physical garments reflect spiritual garments, as it is written: "But Joshua was dressed in filthy garments as he stood before the angel" (Zachariah 3:3). Our Sages explain that these soiled garments represent Joshua's sons who married women unfit for the priesthood (Sanhedrin 93a). Since garments represent spirituality and the inner dimension of a person, it was Moshe Rabbeinu, the leader of all Israel, who dressed Aaron and his sons. This alludes to something that concerns us all: Just as Aaron and his sons annulled themselves before Moshe, who immersed them in water, the symbol of Torah, likewise everyone who yearns for a spiritual garment must humble himself before his rabbanim, who represent the spirit of Torah. In going to learn from his teacher, a student purifies and cleanses himself with the waters of Torah, and as such he will receive a spiritual garment. The path that leads to the acquisition of this garment must therefore pass through humility and self-effacement before the representatives of Torah. Holiness and purity can be obtained by studying and fulfilling Torah, which is compared to living water.

Sacrificing our Desires

The aleph that appears at the beginning of Sefer Vayikra is written smaller than the other letters. As we know, the aleph refers to the Master (Aluph) of the universe. Moshe had yielded so completely to G-d that he felt uncomfortable receiving an affectionate call from Him, envisioning this call instead as a simple vayikar – a chance encounter – for Moshe did not consider himself worthy of it. Along the same lines, the Rebbe of Alexander wrote that we become worthy of seeing the greatness of G-d and the power of His Shechinah when we sense our own unimportance. Conversely, the more we puff ourselves up and feel superior to others, the less important G-d's glory and Shechinah seem to us.

In fact when a person becomes entirely filled with a sense of his own honor, he has no place left to acknowledge the greatness of the Creator. Now to merit a spiritual garment (meaning Torah knowledge and a fear of G-d), it is incumbent upon us to yield to the Master of the universe, as well as to the rabbanim and great men of the generation, who represent the spirit of Torah.

The text continues by stating: "When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem: From animals, from the cattle or from the flock, you shall bring your offering" (Vayikra 1:2). Hence the main principle behind an offering is that it must be from "among you." We must offer ourselves as sacrifices before Hashem.

The term "animals" therefore means that we must sacrifice all our animal desires upon the altar of Torah, meaning our will and desires.

The term "cattle" (bakar) designates the morning (boker). Thus as soon as we arise, we must devote ourselves entirely to our Creator, not occupying ourselves with personal needs first, but starting instead by going to synagogue to pray. Only then should we focus on our personal obligations. The Baal Shem Tov affirmed that it is possible for someone to study Torah and fulfill mitzvot, and yet nevertheless not attain a fear of G-d or grow in serving Him. The Baal Shem Tov attributes this to the fact that upon arising in the morning, such a person places his own needs and desires before the will of G-d. By following material pursuits at the start of the day, a person loses the ability to don spiritual garments, which is the fear of G-d internalized.

Along the same lines, King David wrote: "As for me, G-d's nearness is my good" (Tehillim 73:28). The tzaddik Rabbi Messod Zohar (my Rav when I studied at the Fublaine yeshiva at the age of 12) explained this verse as follows: "King David did not ask G-d for glory, greatness, or majesty, but only to see His face. That was his life's goal, and that was what his soul yearned for." How can we merit G-d's nearness and receive a spiritual garment? It is by offering our very selves – our will and our desires – to Hashem.

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Under the Direction of
**Rabbi David Hanania
Pinto Shlita**

CHEVRAT PINTO

207 West 78th Street
New York - NY 10024

Tel: 1 212 721 0230

www.hevratpinto.org
hevratpinto@aol.com

Editor-in-Chief:
Hanania Soussan

Who Can Open the Gates of Gan Eden?

The commentators cite the Arizal in stating that each festival shines with the same radiance from which their miracles and wonders shined when they first occurred. For example, Pesach shines with the same light as the miracles that occurred during the exodus from Egypt. Likewise Chanukah shines with the same light as the miracles that occurred during the time of the Hasmonians, and Purim shines with the same light as the miracles and wonders that occurred in the time of Mordechai and Esther, when the power of their prayers and repentance annulled the terrible decree of the evil Haman. All the lights that shined in the time of Esther shine again at the time of Purim each year: The lights of faith, a love for Torah, teshuvah, faith in the Sages, and a love for Israel.

Rabbi Yitzchak Weiss Zatzal, the Rebbe of Spinka and author of Chakal Yitzchak, would usually recount the following story each year on the second night of Pesach, at the end of the Seder:

My father Zatzal, the author of Imrei Yosef, would usually recount a story on the second night of Pesach, after the Seder. He said that on one occasion a certain avrech, after having completed the Seder on the second night of Pesach, read Shir HaShirim and continued to recount the story of the exodus from Egypt, as we are told to do on this day. Yet since he had not yet succumbed to sleep, as our Sages put it, he did not want to go to bed. And since the second day of Pesach is the time when the banquet took place in the story of Esther, why not do things in their time? Hence it seemed like a good idea to him to read the Megillah.

When he had finished reading the Megillah, he saw a soul standing before him, asking for a tikkun. He asked the soul, "What connection is there between you and me? What do you want from me?" The soul began to explain that there are souls which, even after being judged by the Celestial Court and receiving what they deserve, still cannot enter Gan Eden until they obtain a certain merit. Yet each year, during the reading of the Megillah, the angels in Heaven open the gates of Gan Eden, at which point all these souls can enter.

The soul continued: "And so, since there are already many long months before the reading of the Megillah, myriads of souls are standing next to the gates of Gan Eden and waiting for its gates to open. Yet because the reading of the Megillah lasts but an hour, two or three at the most, the soul that had time to pass through the gates has earned its place, and the soul that remained outside must wait for the reading of the Megillah on the following year."

The soul explained that many years had already passed since it has been standing outside the gates of Gan Eden, unable to make its way inside. The previous year as well, the gates closed exactly as it was about to enter.

After having missed several opportunities to enter Gan Eden, this soul therefore decided to no longer move from its place. It

would stay there, next to the gates of Gan Eden, until the reading of the Megillah on the following year.

A few weeks passed, and it was still there, still waiting with incredible impatience for the gates of Gan Eden to open. Yet suddenly on the night of Pesach, it heard the Megillah being read!

It immediately began to knock on the gates of Gan Eden in order to be allowed in. After all, the Megillah was being read!

Upon hearing this knocking, the guardian at the gates emerged from Gan Eden and said to the soul: "It's true that someone is reading the Megillah at this time, but it's not the actual time for its reading." The soul replied, "What difference does it make if now is the time for its reading or not? Since the Megillah is actually being read, you have to let me in!"

While they were talking, someone from the Celestial Court emerged and said to them: "The guardian is correct. The reading of the Megillah must be at its designated time, otherwise it is meaningless. However if you descend and find the avrech who is reading the Megillah – and he decides that you should enter – then I'll allow you in."

At that point, the soul begged the avrech to let that moment be as favorable for it as the reading of the Megillah, thus enabling it to enter Gan Eden.

The old chassidim say that our teacher, the Imrei Yosef of Spinka Zatzal, would be very careful regarding the details of any story that he recounted, making sure to never recount any story without mentioning the name of the person being described; otherwise he would recount a story in the name of the Baal Shem Tov. In the case of this story, however, he never specified the name of the avrech. In all likelihood, it was because the avrech was the Imrei Yosef himself. Because of his great humility, however, he never dared say this openly. Hence he never mentioned who the avrech was. See the great power of the Megillah!

– Taken from Haggadah LeBeit Spinka

Guard Your Tongue

A Little Patience

We should be very careful to learn patience and be satisfied with everything that happens to us. Even if we are insulted, we must not respond at all, but instead we must remember that everything comes from Hashem as a result of our sins, which are our real assailants. This will make it easier for us to control our tongues, for without patience we would always be trying to prevent ourselves from telling others what happened to So-and-so, or we would always be paying attention to how we say it, the result being that even if we manage to defeat the evil inclination sometimes, at other times it will defeat us.

– Sha'ar HaTevuna, Chapter 8

A Fire that Burns in the Heart

It is written, “The fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it” (Vayikra 6:2).

The masters of Chassidut have explained this verse in a figurative sense to explain how to serve G-d: If the fire of serving G-d burns within a person, he must ensure that it burns there, meaning within him – not outside of him – so that it doesn’t reach others. We must ensure that the mitzvot we perform (or the fences added to these mitzvot) do not hurt others. It is well-known in the Torah world that the Beit HaLevi, the gaon Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, was extremely exacting with himself in every area, whereas he would be very lenient with others. He demanded that others fulfill the strict law as mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch, meaning the law as it is explained, not more. Each Yom Kippur after the Neila prayer, he ordered that the shofar be immediately sounded and for Arvit to begin. One day, a learned member of the congregation asked him: “The strict law mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch – is it not to wait for doubt to emerge from the heart on a day of fasting?” The Rav replied, “Yes, we must wait for doubt to emerge from the heart, but not for the heart to emerge from doubt!”

Along the same lines, the gaon Rabbi Yaakov Newman said: “Someone once wanted to tell me about the greatness of his son. He said to me, ‘One night during Chol HaMoed Sukkot, a group of avrechim were sitting in my son’s sukkah and began singing G-d’s praises with liveliness and in the joy of the festival. Yet in their spiritual enthusiasm, their voices grew so loud that they woke up an elderly Jew who was sleeping on an upper floor.

“ ‘This elderly Jew, who couldn’t tolerate such noise, threw a bucket of water down on them. At that point my son, who was in the sukkah, exclaimed: ‘How can he throw water here? The Divine Presence dwells in this place!’ ” This is what the man told me to demonstrate the spiritual level of his son.

“I said to him, ‘Do you really think that the Shechinah dwells in a place where people rob the elderly of their sleep? Certainly not! Rejoicing in the festival and singing G-d’s praises is certainly a great mitzvah, but it can lead to sin if it harms others.’ ”

So He Doesn’t Suffer from the Smell

The book Michtav Me-Eliyahu recounts that a multicolored perfume bottle with a colorful rubber pump was located on a table in the home of the mashgiach Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler. The mashgiach’s students knew perfectly well that their teacher and his wife did not use it for themselves. Hence they were surprised that Rabbi Dessler would need it, although nobody dared to ask him about it.

Finally on Purim, the Rav’s apartment was filled with yeshiva students who had come to honor him. A few youngsters even allowed themselves to play with the beautiful perfume bottle and spread a little perfume around as they jokingly asked the Rav which blessing they should make on it.

In his great wisdom, the mashgiach replied: “It seems to me that according to the Halachah, whoever uses something that belongs to another without permission cannot recite a blessing.”

Later on, one of his students recounted that it was only after the passing of the Rebbetzin that this mystery was explained to them: “Until that time, the mashgiach in his great humility would allow us to ask him this embarrassing question, but he remained quiet and offered no response. Only later did we learn that every 15 days, an employee from the laundry service would come to pick up their clothes for cleaning. The Rebbetzin

would therefore spray a little perfume on the clothes so that the employee wouldn’t suffer from the smell of the laundry.”

Another story that demonstrates meticulous attention to showing respect for others is the following: The Rosh Yeshiva of Be’er Yaakov, the gaon Rabbi Moshe Shemuel Shapira, once took a taxi with his son and student. While these two were speaking amongst themselves in Yiddish, the Rav suddenly interrupted them and asked them to speak in Hebrew. When they had left the taxi, the Rav explained his request: “The taxi driver doesn’t understand a word of Yiddish. He may therefore have thought that you were speaking about him, which is not very nice.”

In the Light of the Parsha

Sanctifying our Thoughts at All Times

It is written, “This is the law of the burnt-offering. It is the burnt-offering on the flame, on the altar, all night until the morning. The fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it” (Vayikra 6:2).

In regards to the burnt-offering, the Torah states: “When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem” (Vayikra 1:2). Now this offering comes to atone for evil thoughts (Yerushalmi, Yoma 8:7), and therefore atonement occurs only when accompanied by repentance for these evil thoughts. Later on, the Torah mentions “cattle” as well, meaning that we must also burn the animal natures of our beings before Hashem, as it is written: “Sanctify yourselves in what is permitted to you” (Yebamot 20a), meaning above the strict requirements of the law. By acting in this way, we become worthy of being entirely for G-d, our transgressions will be atoned, and sin will no longer present itself before us.

In fact an evil thought is always at the origin of sin, as mentioned in regards to the verse: “You shall guard yourself against anything evil” (Devarim 23:10). Here the Sages taught, “Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair deduced that a man should not indulge in [morbid] thoughts by day that might lead him to uncleanness by night” (Ketubot 46a). We also read, “Unchaste imagination is more harmful than the sin itself” (Yoma 29a). If we sanctify ourselves with elevated thoughts, like the burnt-offering, we will not engage in sin. The Torah therefore began the account of the offerings with the burnt-offering, for we are not protected from transgression if we fail to sanctify ourselves completely to Hashem, to the point of not letting our thoughts go astray. The burnt-offering is therefore preferable to all other offerings, for it allows us to completely offer ourselves to G-d and sanctify our coarse nature by sanctifying ourselves in what it permitted – over and above the strict requirements of the law. Hence this enables us to gradually grow in the values of Torah and the fear of G-d. If there is a burnt-offering, there is no sin-offering. The Torah alludes to this in the expression, “This is the law of the burnt-offering. It is the burnt-offering...” The essence of the olah (burnt-offering) is that it should be entirely offered to Hashem. Whoever does not feel a spiritual elevation (aliyah) and fails to tell himself, “Perhaps I didn’t serve G-d properly yesterday. I will do better today,” but instead thinks: “I can’t improve my service of G-d. Why should I sanctify myself more than necessary? There’s no end to it! I pray, I study Torah and Mishnah, and I’m far from sin – that’s enough for me,” such a person has clearly not yet reached the state of a burnt-offering for Hashem, nor has he offered the animalistic nature of his being before Him. In fact if he had sanctified the animalistic nature of his being, it would certainly not have prevented him from growing in the service of G-d, even in matters that go beyond the strict requirements of the law.

Welcoming Guests

It is written, “Tzav [Command] Aaron and his sons” (Vayikra 6:2).

Rashi cites the Sages in stating, “The expression tzav always denotes urging for the present and also for future generations. ... Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved” (Torat Kohanim). Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kosov explained that in the time of the Temple, whoever stumbled and sinned would bring an offering, and his sin would be forgiven. In our days, we must give more tzeddakah to atone for sin. Yet on Shabbat, when our pockets are empty and we cannot give tzeddakah, how can we be forgiven? By demonstrating zeal in welcoming needy guests to our table for a Shabbat meal. The needy will refresh themselves, and the sins of their host will be forgiven.

This is what Rashi alludes to in the phrase, “Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved” (literally, a lack in the pocket) – to times when there is no pocket for tzeddakah, meaning on Shabbat.

The Fire Shall Not Go Out

It is written, “The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out” (Vayikra 6:6).

The Sages say, “Ten miracles were done for our forefathers in the Beit Hamikdash: ... The rains did not extinguish the fire on the wood-pile on the altar” (Pirkei Avot 5:5).

This is surprising, for Hashem could have arranged things such that the rains did not fall on the altar at all, in which case such a great miracle would not have been required!

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, however, explained that this teaches us how to conduct ourselves. That is, we must never abandon our service of G-d. Just as the fire was perpetually maintained on the altar and never went out despite the rains the came down on it, likewise we must remain firm and not distance ourselves from serving G-d despite every obstacle that comes to disrupt us in our daily lives.

Most people seek to justify their lack of Torah study by saying that their livelihood would suffer if they were to learn. Yet in reality, everyone must have faith that Hashem will provide him with what he needs, and that the “rains” – meaning everything having to do with materiality and sustenance – will not extinguish the fire, which represents Torah, of which it is said: “Behold, My word is like fire” (Jeremiah 23:29).

A Holy Place

It is written, “It shall be eaten unleavened in a holy place” (Vayikra 6:9).

The Rebbe of Viznitz, Rabbi Chaim Meir, gives us a magnificent explanation of this verse. He says that the matzot of Pesach must be eaten in a holy place, meaning in a sacred mouth – a mouth devoid of forbidden and vain words, one not eager to consume the sustenance of desire.

In the Desert of Sinai

It is written, “He commanded the Children of Israel to bring their offerings to Hashem in the desert of Sinai” (Vayikra 7:38).

This is surprising, for why does the verse specifically mention “the desert of Sinai”? What is so special about this place as compared to all the other places where the Children of Israel brought their offerings?

Rabbi Chizkiyahu bar Manoah, the Chizkuni, answers this very question as follows: The Children of Israel did not bring offerings to Hashem until they reached the desert of Sinai. There they stayed for one year less ten days (they reached the desert on the first day of Sivan in the first year,

and the cloud ascended in the second year, on the twentieth day of the second month, Iyar).

Once in the desert of Sinai, they stopped bringing offerings, as it is written: “Did you bring offerings and meal-offerings to Me for 40 years in the desert?” (Amos 5:25). Likewise, they brought the Pesach offering only while in Egypt and in the desert of Sinai, as well as the Yom Kippur offerings in the second year.

Hence the verse specifically mentions “the desert of Sinai.”

The Torah Replaces the Offerings

It is written, “This is the law of the burnt-offering, the meal-offering, the sin-offering, the guilt-offering, and the inauguration-offerings” (Vayikra 7:37).

Rabbi Yochanan said that when G-d explained the offerings, Moshe exclaimed: “Sovereign of the universe! They are only useful when the Children of Israel are in their own land. What will happen when they are in exile?”

Hashem replied, “Moshe, they will study the Torah and I will forgive them on account of it, more than if they had brought Me all the offerings in the world,” as it is written: “This is the torah [law] of the burnt-offering, the meal-offering, the sin-offering, the guilt-offering, and the inauguration-offerings.”

Hence the Torah replaces the burnt-offering, the meal-offering, and the sin-offering.

Rabbi Kruspedai said, “Whoever goes to synagogues and houses of study and intensely learns about the offerings and laws that govern them is assured that the angels which generally point out people’s sins in order to harm them will now help them.”

– Zohar, Vayeira 100a

Men of Faith

Cutting off the Electricity

Rabbi Shimon HaCohen, the grandson of Rabbi David ben Baruch, told Rabbi David Hanania Pinto that he once journeyed from Mogador to Marrakech with his wife. As they were traveling, his wife was very worried and told him that she remembered that she left the iron on at home, and that there was a real chance a fire could break out. Rabbi Shimon immediately telephoned his neighbors in Mogador and asked them to go into his home and unplug the iron.

To his great surprise, however, his neighbors said that they didn’t need to.

“And why is that?” asked the Rav.

“Because Rabbi Haim Pinto already came this morning and asked us to cut off the electricity to your apartment. He said that you went on a trip and forgot to turn off an iron.”

Rabbi Shimon HaCohen also related another story: While they were constructing a building in Mogador, Rabbi Haim Pinto Hakatan came to him and said: “Rabbi Shimon, something is going to happen here today. Yet because of the merit of your holy fathers, it won’t be serious.”

In fact not long afterwards, a worker fell from a great height, but without ill effect. The merit of Rabbi Haim, who had prayed for him, ensured that he wasn’t injured. The worker got up in good health and went to tell Rabbi Shimon about the great miracle that had taken place, and to thank G-d with him.